

When my eldest son, Daniel, was a youngster, he developed an infection on his hand from playing on monkey bars at a playground. His skin was torn and infection set in. His hand developed a rather large blister. Rather than taking him to a doctor immediately, we took a needle and popped the blister open and drained it. The next day he went to visit his uncle. We later got a call from my brother stating that he was worried because my son's hand was getting much worse and that Daniel was feeling sick. I picked up my son and took him to the emergency room. I could see discoloration in his veins starting from the infected hand and leading all the way up his arm to his heart. He spent three days in the hospital, going from critical care in the ICU to a regular room and made steady progress because the doctors applied very heavy doses of antibiotics into his system. The doctor explained to my wife and I that popping the blister was the worst thing we could have possibly done. We meant well, but we broke a seal that nature had created and invited infection to enter his body through the opening. The blister was nature's way of sealing off the poison and keeping it from spreading from an extremity to his vital organs.

I think of this when I start analyzing the disease model of addiction. What if the doctor had looked at my son with the infected hand and told us that our son had a disease. That he was born with a strange malady that caused infection to spread through his body? But the doctor didn't do that. He knew from his medical training, that this was a normal reaction from a healthy body. The body looks like it has a disease, but it is not the person that is at fault, it is the infection that is to blame. By treating the infection directly, using antibiotics, he allowed my son to live. This is what I think of in terms of gambling addiction. When we gamble, we are introducing an infection into our lives. A poison, if you will. Our body reacts. It becomes addicted. Now we have two choices. Blame ourselves and look at ourselves as diseased, or look at ourselves as normal and blame the gambling. I believe it is far better to look at ourselves as normal and blame the gambling.

I have spent time trying to better understand addictions and how to help people. I have gone out to the homeless in my city. I have talked to them one on one. I have given food, clothes, encouragement and support. I feel sad for these people. I have learned how powerful addictions are. I have tried to find the common link, the Holy Grail of addictions, so to speak, so that I could solve the world's problems. But I didn't find that. What I found is that each person is a unique individual. What works for one person may not work for another.

I've talked to alcoholics and crack addicts trying to find similarities to gambling. I've read about dopamine and serotonin, about neural pathways, about behavior modification, about reptilian brains and addictive voices and inner tapes. I've been confused because no one seems to have the definitive solution to addictions. I've only come up with this so far, it all depends on the questions you ask yourself. Some people turn their anger inwards and say to themselves, "I am no good, I have a disease, I am worthless, I do nothing but screw up my life, I have no hope." When I talk to people who have this frame of reference, I find that they remain in their addictive state.

People who ask themselves, "what can I do to get better? I need help, can you help me" have greater success. We can change. I've seen it happen to many people. We need to understand that our mind gives us back answers based on how we word the questions.

It is not for anyone to say that one approach is "Right" and one is "Wrong." The only way to measure the different models of recovery is to find which works for you. Try one approach and if that doesn't work, try another. Keep an open mind. Remember, that the way you view things affects the outcome.